

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

1. (Currently amended) A method of supplying starter cultures of consistent quality, ~~the method comprising the steps of:~~ (i) providing an inoculum material comprising starter culture organism cells ~~a concentrate of starter culture organism cells~~, (ii) allowing the starter culture organism cells to propagate for a period of time sufficient to produce a desired amount of said starter culture organism cells; and (iii) harvesting the propagated cells to obtain a starter culture,

the method in step (i) improved by the steps of:

~~(iii)(a) concentrating said inoculum material of step (i) to obtain a concentrated stock inoculum material,~~

~~(iii)(b) dividing said concentrated inoculum material into subsets thereof, each of said subsets having a quality sufficient to inoculate a cultivation medium, and~~

~~(iv)(c) inoculating a subset of the stock inoculum material by direct, one step inoculation of said cultivation medium;~~

~~(v) allowing the starter culture organism cells to propagate for a period of time sufficient to produce a desired amount of said starter culture organism cells; and~~

~~(vi) harvesting the propagated cells to obtain a starter culture,~~

the method permitting, when steps ~~(ii)(iv)~~ through ~~(iii)(vi)~~ are repeated with another subset of the stock inoculum material, the supply of starter cultures having a consistent quality.

2. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the ~~stock~~ inoculum material provided in step (i) is in quantities sufficient to inoculate at least 50,000 litres of cultivation medium.

3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the concentrated stock inoculum material provided in step ~~(a)(i)~~ contains at least 10^8 CFU per g.

4. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the subset of the stock inoculum material in step (c)(iv) is directly inoculated in the cultivation medium at a rate of maximum 0.1%.
5. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the amount of the subset of the stock inoculum material for direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (c)(iv) provides a ratio of the CFU per g of cultivation medium, immediately after inoculation, relative to the CFU per g of the subset of the stock inoculum material being inoculated, said ratio being in the range from 1:100 to 1:100,000.
6. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the cultivation medium immediately after the inoculation in step (c) (iv) contains a number of CFU per g of cultivation medium which is at least 10^5 .
7. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the cultivation medium in step (ii)(iv) comprises any conventional medium used for propagation of microbial cells.
8. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the stock inoculum material and/or the subset of the stock inoculum material is in a state selected from the group consisting of a liquid, frozen and dried state.
9. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 8, wherein the frozen subset of the stock inoculum material is thawed before direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (c)(iv).
10. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 8, wherein the subset of the stock inoculum material is combined with an aqueous medium to obtain a suspension of the cells before direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (c)(iv).
11. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (c)(iv) is provided under aseptical conditions or under substantially aseptical conditions.
12. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the stock inoculum material is supplied in sealed enclosures.
13. (Original) A method according to claim 12, wherein the sealed enclosures are made of a flexible material selected from the group consisting of a polyolefin, a substituted olefin, a copolymer

of ethylene, a polypropylene, a polyethylene, a polyester, a polycarbonate, a polyamide, an acrylonitrile and a cellulose derivative.

14. (Original) A method according to claim 12, wherein the sealed enclosed are made of a flexible material comprising a metal foil.

15. (Original) A method according to claim 12, wherein the sealed enclosures have a cubic content of at least 0.01 litre.

16. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 12, wherein the sealed enclosures are supplied with outlet means for connection of the enclosure to a container comprising the cultivation medium, said outlet means permitting the concentrate of cells to be introduced substantially aseptically into the container to inoculate the cultivation medium with said concentrate of cells.

17. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the starter culture organism in step (i) originates from a species selected from the group consisting of a lactic acid bacterial species, a *Bifidobacterium* species, a *Propionibacterium* species, a *Staphylococcus* species, a *Micrococcus* species, a *Bacillus* species, an *Actinomycetes* species, a *Corynebacterium* species, a *Brevibacterium* species, a *Pediococcus* species, a *Pseudomonas* species, a *Sphingomonas* species, a *Mycobacterium* species, a *Rhodococcus* species, an *Enterobacteriaceae* species, a fungal species and a yeast species.

18. (Original) A method according to claim 17, wherein the lactic acid bacterial species is selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus* spp., *Lactobacillus* spp., *Leuconostoc* spp., *Pediococcus* spp., *Oenococcus* spp. and *Streptococcus* spp.

19. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the ~~steek~~ inoculum material in step (i) comprises at least two starter culture strains.

20. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the starter culture is a starter culture used in the food industry, feed industry or pharmaceutical industry.

21. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the starter culture is used for inoculation of milk which is further processed to obtain a dairy product, which is selected from the group consisting of cheese, yogurt, butter, inoculated sweet milk and a liquid fermented milk product.

22. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the cells being propagated in the cultivation medium express a desired gene product or produce a desired product.

23. (Original) A method according to claim 22, wherein the desired gene product is selected from the group consisting of enzymes, pharmaceutically active substances, polysaccharides and amino acids.

24. (Original) A method according to claim 22, wherein the desired product is selected from the group consisting of pigments, flavouring compounds, emulsifiers, vitamins, growth-stimulating compounds, food additives and feed additives.

25. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 7, wherein the medium comprises one or more single milk components.

26. (Previously presented) The method of claim 25, wherein one or more single milk components include skimmed milk.

27. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein steps (ii) through (iii) are repeated with another subset of the stock inoculum material and the supply of starter cultures resulting from each inoculation have a consistent quality.